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House of Representatives
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ENVIRONMENT

December 15, 2021

The Honorable Ron DeSantis, Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis:

I write with urgent concern about the omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus that has killed more than 800,000 Americans, including more than 62,000 Floridians. Data coming out of South Africa and the United Kingdom seem to indicate that the omicron variant is far more contagious than even the delta variant that ravaged our state this summer¹. As of the writing of this letter, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that vaccines are still expected to protect against severe illness and death, while at the same time recommending that everyone get vaccinated and everyone eligible get a booster shot².

As we all now know, America was not prepared for the first pandemic of our lifetimes. And even though it is clear how to beat the virus, it breaks my heart that too many of our leaders openly ignore sound science³, spread falsehoods about face masks⁴, embrace anti-vaccination's flawed ideology⁵, and elevate voices that advocate fake treatments⁶ and espouse dangerous "herd immunity" theories⁷.

¹ Apoorva Mandavilli. "Omicron Variant Spreading Twice as Quickly as Delta in South Africa." *New York Times*. December 15, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/03/health/coronavirus-omicron-vaccines-contagiousness.html>

² "Omicron Variant: What You Need to Know." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. December 14, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html>

³ Aaron Blake. "Ron DeSantis and the worst fallacy about vaccine skepticism." *Washington Post*. September 7, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/07/ron-desantis-worst-fallacy-about-vaccine-skepticism/>

⁴ Victoria Knight. "DeSantis' Executive Order Is Misleading About Lack of Scientific Support for Masking in Schools." *KHN & PolitiFact Healthcheck*. August 11, 2021. <https://khn.org/news/article/fact-check-florida-governor-ron-desantis-executive-order-mask-mandates-schools/>

⁵ Marc Caputo and Gary Fineout. "DeSantis flirts with the anti-vaccine crowd." *Politico*. September 15, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2021/09/15/desantis-flirts-with-the-anti-vaccine-crowd-1391038>

⁶ Arek Sarkissian. "How a doctor who questioned vaccine safety became DeSantis' surgeon general pick." *Politico*. September 29, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2021/09/29/how-a-doctor-who-questioned-vaccine-safety-became-desantis-surgeon-general-pick-1391488>

⁷ David Fleshler. "Handpicked experts assure Gov. DeSantis his COVID critics are wrong." *South Florida Sun Sentinel*. March 18, 2021. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/coronavirus/fl-ne-desantis-covid-scientists-20210318-5wpcx3kjoyvauvnanntmhmjqkcmq-story.html>

I know Floridians are sick and tired of the pandemic. I am, too. But it is still with us, and more importantly it's incumbent upon our state's leaders to rise to the public health challenges it presents, by providing accurate medical advice to the public in order to protect lives and our economy. In the case of the omicron variant, that means actively and regularly promoting vaccines, including the importance of people getting their shots and staying updated with a booster. It means allowing local governments to take the steps necessary to protect their citizens. It means promoting indoor mask wearing in appropriate circumstances, like when infection rates are high. And it means getting out of the way when schools require masks to keep everyone safe and in the classroom where they belong.

While early data thankfully indicate that illness from the omicron variant is less severe than with delta, cases are doubling at an alarming rate⁸. That raises alarm for those at higher risk, those with pre-existing conditions, our seniors, people with disabilities, and above all, the unvaccinated. Given the sheer volume of cases we may incur based on what's happening overseas, the risk of our health care facilities being stretched beyond capacity is something that must be taken seriously. Such a scenario means that even those in need of care unrelated to COVID would be put in jeopardy.

To that effect, I implore you to act immediately, using the full weight of your office and administration, to plan and prepare our state for the impact we may face from omicron. That should include using the bully pulpit of your office to provide sound, responsible medical advice, to promote vaccination before it's too late, and to work with our cities, counties, and medical institutions to get them the resources they need to handle a potential surge.

I will continue to pray for you and our state, that this variant fails to rise to this serious level of infection and hospitalization. As always, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And also in that vein, it is important to note that some of the monoclonal antibodies treatment that worked so well for people sick with previous variants unfortunately do not seem to be effective against omicron⁹. I urge you to rise to this challenge for the good of our state and her people.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

⁸ Rob Picheta. "Britain battles Omicron 'tidal wave,' as infections double every two to three days and first death from variant is recorded." *CNN*. December 13, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/13/uk/uk-omicron-infections-tidal-wave-gbr-intl/index.html>

⁹ Ludwig Burger. "Lab tests: Eli Lilly, Regeneron antibody therapies lose out against Omicron." *Reuters*. December 14, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/lab-test-eli-lilly-regeneron-antibody-therapies-lose-out-against-omicron-2021-12-14/>